

P.S. What'n Blazes Is A "Perfin"? by C. Hapgood Parks

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Although most well-informed collectors are familiar with Perfins by now, the following story is a sample of what happens when philatelic language is used on non-philatelists....The excitement started when I decided to place an advertisement in "Yankee's 'Trading Post'" ("Yankee" is a New England magazine of general interest).

During the many years that I have been interested in Perfins, my search for them had been restricted almost entirely to examining accumulated dregs which were left after having been picked over repeatedly by other seekers.

It was my determination to obtain some virgin Perfin material for myself which brought about the Trading Post decision. So I sat me down to compose the advertisement.

Remembering that somebody, somewhere, sometime had advised that an ad must be eye-catching if it is to be effective, I finally decided upon:

"PERFINS: Will provide a good home for your surplus Perfins. How many have you for how much?" I typed it and dropped it in the mail.

"Ye Ed", forever solicitous of the sanctity of his Yankee, lest anything illogical, illegal or illicit be found upon its pages, came back in the next mail with: "Please, what is a Perfin?"

The sample I sent him apparently passed the test, for the ad was carried in an early following edition.

Very frankly, it was submitted with not too much enthusiasm and even less confidence, but I had underestimated Yankee's magnetism or the eye-catching qualities of my first venture into ad writing - or was it, perhaps, something about the Perfins themselves?

Anyhow, as I sat reading the January Yankee the evening after its arrival, my telephone rang and a woman's voice inquired:

"Are you the Mr. Parks who is advertising for Perfins in this month's Yankee?" I was.

"I'm calling from East Hartland," she continued, "and nobody here knows what a Perfin is. Will you please tell us?"

I did - and resumed reading.

Next day brought two more phone calls, this time from local acquaintances who were cognizant of the fact that Mrs. Parks and I are quite active ornithologically.

One of these callers was quite certain that a Perfin was some new species of bird.

The other accused Yankee of a possible misspelling of one of the feathered sub-arctic species - the Puffin!

The next time the telephone rang, the voice was that of a representative of a "hobby magazine." This person felt sure that Perfins must be tropical fish; "Perfin", of course, could mean nothing less than perfect fin.

The final caller, a Canton, Conn., lady, guessed that Perfin must be a code word for some sort of living thing that brought into the world litters of young so numerous that certain ones were surplus beyond immediate need.

Ere the telephone ceased to ring, our letter carrier began to experience the effect of Yankee's appeal. Bulging envelopes brought interesting accumulations from addresses in Winchendon and East Lynn, Mass.; Newport, R.I.; Brandon, Vt.; and from a sprouting swap shop in Lakeport, N.H.

Other envelopes bulged much less and, to read their contents was almost to believe that the word Perfin belongs in the vocabulary of some unknown tongue. Witness the following quotes from letters:

From Plainfield, N.J.: "Will you please explain what Perfins are, as advertised in the January edition of Yankee magazine?" Park Ridge, Ill.: "If you will tell me what are Perfins, I'd know if I had any in need of a good home and for how much." Wollaston, Mass.: "What is a PERFIN!" This question was printed on a return-addressed postal card, the entire contents of the envelope.

From Boonsboro, Md.: "In reference to your advertisement on page 88, we would love to send you our surplus Perfins, but do you know, way down here in Maryland, we just aren't sure we have any."

"Just what are Perfins? Can't find it either in our dictionaries or reference books and curiosity has gotten the better of us."

From Burlington, Vt., came these scholarly remarks: "I read with some interest your ad for Perfins in the Yankee. My problem is, what is a Perfin? Webster's unabridged Dictionary and nine different college graduates have been consulted without success. The latter includes three Phi Beta Kappas and one Rhodes Scholar. Please tell us what is a Perfin."

From Boonton, N.J., came the letter that inspired an attempt on the part of the author to enlighten Yankee readers whomay have wondered, yet did not voice their puzzlement.

Although this letter did not adapt itself well to extraction of quotes, its nicely typed lines bear witness of a direly distressed damsel who suffered the anguish of complete frustration.

Its page-long dissertation is summed up most concisely in a postscript I borrowed for my title.

Although these lines do not answer the question, that is amply covered in some of the other contributed articles, this story also suggests what a little enterprise can do to solve the problems faced by many Perfin collectors - finding fresh sources. The hunt is half the fun.